

UK Patent Application GB 2 406 697 A

(43) Date of Printing by UK Office 06.04.2005

(21) Application No:	0502537.4	(51) INT CL ⁷ : G07F 17/32
(22) Date of Filing:	06.08.2003	(52) UK CL (Edition X): G4V VAA V118
(30) Priority Data:		(56) Documents Cited by ISA: US 6322309 A1 US 6186894 B1
(31) 10231679	(32) 30.08.2002	(33) US
(86) International Application Data: PCT/US2003/024679 En 06.08.2003		(58) Field of Search by ISA: INT CL ⁷ G07F Other: EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ
(87) International Publication Data: WO2004/021291 En 11.03.2004		

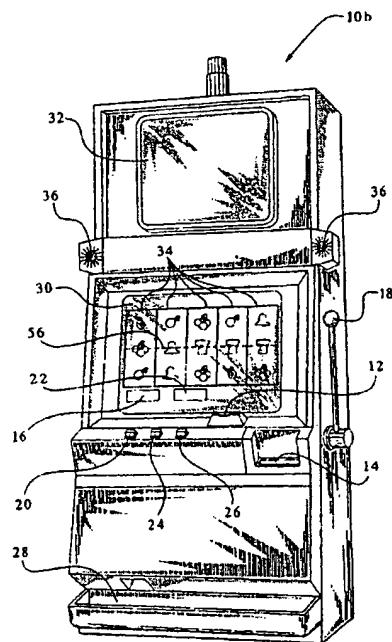
(71) Applicant(s):
IGT
(Incorporated in USA - Nevada)
9295 Prototype Drive, Reno,
NV 89521-8986, United States of America

(72) Inventor(s):
Bayard S. Webb
Anthony J Baerlocher

(continued on next page)

(54) Abstract Title: Gaming device having a first and second game

(57) A gaming device with a first game scheme which includes one or more symbol generators and one or more second games. When the symbol generator generates one or more predetermined symbols, the gaming device operates one or more second games. If the player reaches a win condition in one or more second games, the gaming device provides the player with an award. If the symbol generator generates one or more termination symbols, the first game is terminated.



GB 2 406 697 A

Original Printed on Recycled Paper

BEST AVAILABLE COPY

GB 2406697 A continuation

(74) Agent and/or Address for Service:
Wilson Gunn M'Caw
5th Floor, Blackfriars House,
The Parsonage, MANCHESTER, M3 2JA,
United Kingdom

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
25 March 2004 (25.03.2004)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2004/025584 A2

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: G07F 17/32 (81) Designated States (national): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US2003/027219 (84) Designated States (regional): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

(22) International Filing Date: 2 September 2003 (02.09.2003)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data: 10/241,255 11 September 2002 (11.09.2002) US

(71) Applicant: IGT [US/US]; 9295 Prototype Drive, Reno, NV 89521 (US).

(72) Inventors: CHING, Erick, T.; 5685 W. Brookdale Drive, Reno, NV 89523 (US). HOHMAN, JasonLee, Kissee; 14065 Red Rock Road, Reno, NV 89506 (US).

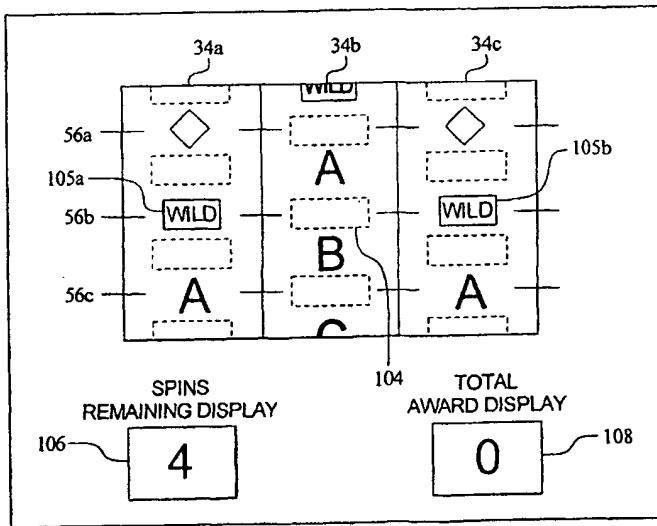
(74) Agent: MASIA, Adam, H.; Bell, Boyd & Lloyd LLC, P.O. Box 1135, Chicago, IL 60690-1135 (US).

Published:

— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

(54) Title: GAMING DEVICE HAVING A PROBABILITY ENHANCING TRIGGER SYMBOL



(57) Abstract: A gaming device including a award mode in a primary game that increases the probability of obtaining an award in the primary game. The gaming device includes a plurality of reels having several symbols where the symbols include award symbols, at least one trigger symbol and at least one wild symbol. The gaming device activates the reels and initiates the award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on one of the paylines associated with the reels. In the award mode, the gaming device re-activates all of the reels except the reel including the trigger symbol until those reels indicate a wild symbol on the payline. The gaming device then re-activates the reel including the trigger symbol until an award symbol is indicated on that reel. The gaming device provides the award associated with the indicated award symbol on the payline on that reel to the player.

WO 2004/025584 A2

SPECIFICATION

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

"GAMING DEVICE HAVING A PROBABILITY ENHANCING TRIGGER SYMBOL"

5

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Gaming device manufacturers strive to make gaming devices that provide as much enjoyment and excitement as possible. Providing a game in which a player has an opportunity to win potentially large awards or credits is 10 one way to enhance player enjoyment and excitement.

Currently, gaming machines or devices provide games wherein a player has one or more opportunities to obtain a winning symbol combination on mechanical or video reels. The winning symbol combination may be along the same payline or on different paylines (known as a scatter pay). By providing 15 gaming devices with more winning symbol combinations, players have more opportunities to receive an award.

In known gaming devices, however, the probability of obtaining the largest award (i.e., the jackpot award) is typically much lower than the probability of obtaining the other awards in a game. Thus, although a player 20 may obtain more awards in a game, these awards are generally the relatively small awards and not the relatively large awards such as the jackpot award.

Many jurisdiction have regulations that prohibit changing the probability of occurrence associated with the reel symbols. This makes it more difficult to create bonus or secondary games with high payouts using the bonus game 25 reels and reel symbols.

Gaming devices that increase the probability of obtaining the relatively large award and specifically, the jackpot award, are desirable. To increase player enjoyment and excitement, it is desirable to provide new games and gaming devices which increase the likelihood or probability that the player will 30 obtain one or more relatively large awards in a game.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a gaming device including an award mode of a primary game or bonus game where the probability of obtaining an

award and specifically, a relatively large award increases when the player enters the award mode or bonus game.

In one embodiment, the gaming device includes a plurality of reels, each having a plurality of symbols. These symbols include a plurality of award symbols, at least one non-award symbol or null symbol or blank, at least one trigger symbol or symbol combination and at least one wild symbol. One or more paylines are associated with the reels to indicate symbols or symbol combinations on the reels, which are evaluated for winning symbol combinations. The symbols may be any suitable symbols such as letters, 10 numbers, characters or any other suitable images. The award mode also includes a triggering event, which in one embodiment, includes a trigger symbol occurring on the reels. In one embodiment, the triggering event occurs when the trigger symbol is indicated on a designated reel on one of the paylines associated with the reels. In another embodiment, the triggering event occurs 15 when the trigger symbol occurs on any of the paylines.

In a primary game, the gaming device initiates the award mode when the triggering event occurs in the game. In the award mode, the gaming device holds the reel including the trigger symbol stationary while activating or spinning the other reels until those reels indicate a wild symbol on the payline. The 20 gaming device then holds the reels including the wild symbols stationary while reactivating or re-spinning the reel including the trigger symbol. Thus, the award mode effectively reduces the game to a single reel game where only one of the award symbols on the reel indicates a winning symbol combination in the award mode.

25 In the award mode, the gaming device re-activates or re-spins the reel including the trigger symbol until one of the award symbols is indicated on the payline on that reel. For instance, if a non-award or null symbol, or the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline in the award mode, the gaming device re-spins the reel until one of the award symbols or the wild symbol is indicated on 30 the payline. The null symbols and the trigger symbol do not provide an award to the player in the award mode, but instead cause the gaming device to re-spin the reels. Therefore, the player is guaranteed to receive one of the award symbols or the wild symbol in the award mode before the award mode ends.

Reducing the number of symbols that may be indicated on the payline to end the game, increases the probability that any one of the award symbols will be indicated on the payline. The gaming device then provides the award associated with the indicated award symbol or the indicated award symbol 5 combination to the player. The award is added to the player's total award in a total award display and the bonus mode ends. In another embodiment, the player continues to re-activate the reels in the award mode if the player has spins remaining in the award mode.

The gaming device of the present invention effectively reduces the game 10 to a single reel game or event which increases the probability or chance that a player will obtain an award in the award mode and specifically that the player will obtain a relatively large award such as jackpot award in the award mode. For example, in a three reel slot game, if each of the reels in the game includes twenty symbols including the trigger symbol, wild symbol and non-award or null 15 symbols, the probability or chance of obtaining an award symbol combination in that game is $(1/20) \times (1/20) \times (1/20)$ or 1 in 8000.

In the award mode the game is reduced to a single reel game as described above. Therefore, the probability of obtaining an award symbol (or symbol combination) in the award mode significantly increases. The probability 20 is determined by multiplying the probability of the trigger symbol being indicated in the primary game (i.e., 1 in 20) by the probability of indicating one of the award symbols occurring in the award mode (i.e., 1 in 9). Therefore, the probability of one of the award symbols (or symbol combinations) being indicated in the game (through the award mode) is $(1/20) \times (1/9)$, which equals a 25 probability of $(1/180)$. Thus, it is significantly more likely that the player will obtain one of the award symbols and therefore a winning award symbol combination in game through the award mode. This increases the player's excitement and enjoyment of the game because the player has a greater opportunity or probability of obtaining the relatively large award or jackpot award 30 in the award mode.

In one embodiment, a probability of being indicated on the payline is associated with each of the symbols on the reels. In one aspect of this embodiment, the probability associated with the trigger symbol is less than the

probability associated with at least one of the award symbols, null symbols and the wild symbol on the reels. In another aspect of this embodiment, the probability associated with the trigger symbol is less than a plurality of the probabilities associated with the award symbols, null symbols and the wild symbol. In a further aspect of this embodiment, the probability associated with the trigger symbol is less than all of the probabilities associated with the award symbols, null symbols and the wild symbol in the game.

Similarly in another embodiment, the award symbols include one relatively large award and several relative small awards. In this embodiment, a probability of being indicated on the payline is associated with the award symbols such that the probability associated with the award symbol including the relatively large award is less than at least one of the probabilities associated with the award symbols including the relatively small awards being indicated on the payline. In another embodiment, the probability associated with the award symbol including the relatively large award is less than a plurality of the probabilities associated with the award symbols including the relatively small awards. In a further embodiment, the probability associated with the award symbol including the relatively large award is less than all of the probabilities associated with the award symbols including the relatively small awards.

In a further embodiment, the award mode of the present invention includes an award associated with a winning symbol combination including all wild symbols. In this embodiment, if the award mode is initiated and a wild symbol is indicated on the payline associated with the reels, in combination with the other wild symbols indicated on the payline, the gaming device provides the maximum or largest award in the game, such as the jackpot award. In another embodiment, the gaming device provides a predetermined award associated with a winning symbol combination including wild symbols in the game.

It should be appreciated that although the present application primarily discusses a trigger symbol, a combination of symbols (i.e., a trigger symbol combination) could be employed to trigger the award mode. It should also be appreciated that the trigger symbol could function as a wild symbol and one of the other reels could re-activated.

It is therefore an advantage of the present invention to provide a gaming device that provides an increase probability of obtaining awards in a game.

Another advantage of the present invention is to provide a gaming device that increases the probability of obtaining a relatively large award in a game.

5 It is a further advantage of the present invention to provide a gaming device that increases the probability of obtaining the jackpot award in a game.

Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed disclosure, taken in conjunction with the accompanying sheets of drawings, wherein like numerals refer to like parts, 10 elements, components, steps and processes.

Additional features and advantages of the present invention are described in, and will be apparent from, the following Detailed Description of the Invention and the figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

15 Fig. 1A is a front perspective view of one embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention.

Fig. 1B is a front perspective view of another embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention.

Fig. 1C is an enlarged elevation view of a set of reels and the reel stop 20 positions included on the reels in a three reel slot game.

Fig. 2 is a schematic block diagram of the electronic configuration of one embodiment of the gaming device of the present invention.

Fig. 3A is an enlarged elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B illustrating one embodiment of the present invention.

25 Fig. 3B is an award table illustrating the symbol combinations and the awards associated with the symbols combinations of the embodiment of Fig. 3A.

Fig. 4A is probability table illustrating the probability of each of the symbols being indicated on each of the reels in a primary game.

30 Fig. 4B is probability table illustrating the probability of each of the symbols being indicated on each of the reels in an award mode.

Figs. 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E and 5F are enlarged front elevation views of an example of the embodiment shown in Fig. 3 illustrating a primary game and an

award mode initiated by the occurrence of a triggering event in the primary game.

Fig. 6 is an enlarged elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B illustrating another embodiment of the present invention.

5 Fig. 7 is an enlarged elevation view of one of the display devices of Figs. 1A and 1B illustrating a further embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Gaming Device and Electronics

Referring now to the drawings, two embodiments of the gaming device of 10 the present invention are illustrated in Figs. 1A and 1B as gaming device 10a and gaming device 10b, respectively. Gaming device 10a and/or gaming device 10b are generally referred to herein as gaming device 10. Gaming device 10 is preferably a slot machine having the controls, displays and features of a conventional slot machine. It is constructed so that a player can operate it while 15 standing or sitting, and gaming device 10 is preferably mounted on a console. However, it should be appreciated that gaming device 10 can be constructed as a pub-style table-top game (not shown) which a player can operate preferably while sitting. Furthermore, gaming device 10 can be constructed with varying cabinet and display designs, as illustrated by the designs shown in Figs. 1A and 20 1B. Gaming device 10 can also be implemented as a program code stored in a detachable cartridge for operating a hand-held video game device. Also, gaming device 10 can be implemented as a program code stored on a disk or other memory device which a player can use in a desktop or laptop personal computer or other computerized platform.

25 Gaming device 10 can incorporate any primary game such as slot, black jack, poker or keno, any of the bonus triggering events and any of the bonus round games. The symbols and indicia used on and in gaming device 10 may be in mechanical, electrical, electronic or video form.

As illustrated in Figs. 1A and 1B, gaming device 10 includes a coin slot 30 12 and bill acceptor 14 where the player inserts money, coins or tokens. The player can place coins in the coin slot 12 or paper money or ticket vouchers in the bill acceptor 14. Other devices could be used for accepting payment such as readers or validators for credit cards or debit cards. When a player inserts

money in gaming device 10, a number of credits corresponding to the amount deposited is shown in a credit display 16. After depositing the appropriate amount of money, a player can begin the game by pulling arm 18 or pushing play button 20. Play button 20 can be any play activator used by the player 5 which starts any game or sequence of events in the gaming device.

As shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, gaming device 10 also includes a bet display 22 and a bet one button 24. The player places a bet by pushing the bet one button 24. The player can increase the bet by one credit each time the player pushes the bet one button 24. When the player pushes the bet one 10 button 24, the number of credits shown in the credit display 16 decreases by one, and the number of credits shown in the bet display 22 increases by one.

A player may cash out and thereby receive a number of coins corresponding to the number of remaining credits by pushing a cash out button 26. When the player cashes out, the player receives the coins in a coin payout 15 tray 28. The gaming device 10 may employ other payout mechanisms such as credit slips redeemable by a cashier or electronically recordable cards which keep track of the player's credits.

Gaming device 10 also includes one or more display devices. The embodiment shown in Fig. 1A includes a central display device 30, and the 20 alternative embodiment shown in Fig. 1B includes a central display device 30 as well as an upper display device 32. Gaming device 10 displays a plurality of reels 34 such as three to five reels 34 in mechanical or video form at one or more of the display devices. A display device can be any viewing surface such as glass, a video monitor or screen, a liquid crystal display or any other display 25 mechanism. If the reels 34 are in video form, the display device for the video reels 34 is preferably a video monitor.

Each reel 34 displays a plurality of indicia such as bells, hearts, fruits, numbers, letters, bars or other images, which preferably correspond to a theme associated with the gaming device 10. Furthermore, gaming device 10 30 preferably includes speakers 36 for making sounds or playing music.

As illustrated in Fig. 2, the general electronic configuration of gaming device 10 preferably includes: a processor 38; a memory device 40 for storing program code or other data; a central display device 30; an upper display

device 32; a sound card 42; a plurality of speakers 36; and one or more input devices 44. The processor 38 is preferably a microprocessor or microcontroller-based platform which is capable of displaying images, symbols and other indicia such as images of people, characters, places, things and faces of cards. The 5 memory device 40 can include random access memory (RAM) 46 for storing event data or other data generated or used during a particular game. The memory device 40 can also include read only memory (ROM) 48 for storing program code which controls the gaming device 10 so that it plays a particular game in accordance with applicable game rules and pay tables.

10 As illustrated in Fig. 2, the player preferably uses the input devices 44, such as pull arm 18, play button 20, the bet one button 24 and the cash out button 26 to input signals into gaming device 10. In certain instances it is preferable to use a touch screen 50 and an associated touch screen controller 52 instead of a conventional video monitor display device. Touch screen 50 15 and touch screen controller 52 are connected to a video controller 54 and processor 38. A player can make decisions and input signals into the gaming device 10 by touching touch screen 50 at the appropriate places. As further illustrated in Fig. 2, the processor 38 can be connected to coin slot 12 or bill acceptor 14. The processor 38 can be programmed to require a player to 20 deposit a certain amount of money in order to start the game.

It should be appreciated that although a processor 38 and memory device 40 are preferable implementations of the present invention, the present invention can also be implemented using one or more application-specific integrated circuits (ASIC's) or other hard-wired devices, or using mechanical 25 devices (collectively or alternatively referred to herein as a "processor"). Furthermore, although the processor 38 and memory device 40 preferably reside on each gaming device 10 unit, it is possible to provide some or all of their functions at a central location such as a network server for communication to a playing station such as over a local area network (LAN), wide area network 30 (WAN), Internet connection, microwave link, and the like. The processor 38 and memory device 40 is generally referred to herein as the "computer" or "controller."

With reference to Figs. 1A, 1B and 2, to operate the gaming device 10 in one embodiment the player must insert the appropriate amount of money or tokens at coin slot 12 or bill acceptor 14 and then pull the arm 18 or push the play button 20. The reels 34 will then begin to spin. Eventually, the reels 34 will 5 come to a stop. As long as the player has credits remaining, the player can spin the reels 34 again. Depending upon where the reels 34 stop, the player may or may not win additional credits.

In addition to winning credits in this manner, gaming device 10 also gives 10 players the opportunity to win credits in a bonus round. This type of gaming device 10 will include a program which will automatically initiates a bonus round when the player has achieved a qualifying condition in the game. This qualifying condition can be a particular arrangement of indicia on a display device. The gaming device 10 preferably uses a video-based central display device 30 to enable the player to play the bonus round. Preferably, the 15 qualifying condition is a predetermined combination of indicia appearing on one or more of a plurality of the reels 34. As illustrated in the five reel slot game shown in Figs. 1A and 1B, the qualifying condition could be the number seven appearing on three adjacent reels 34 along a payline 56. It should be appreciated that the present invention can include one or more paylines, such 20 as payline 56, wherein the paylines can be horizontal, diagonal or any combination thereof.

Probability Enhancing Trigger Symbol

Referring to Figs. 1C, 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B, one embodiment of the reels of the present invention is illustrated where three reels are employed in a game. It 25 should be appreciated that any suitable number of reels may be employed in the primary game. In this embodiment, each of the reels 34a, 34b and 34c includes symbols 100, which are represented by letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H, non-award or null symbols or blanks 104, at least one trigger symbol 102 and at least one wild symbol 105. It should be appreciated that any suitable number 30 and types of symbols may be employed in a game according to the present invention. Each symbol is positioned at a reel stop position or reel stop on each of the reels. Therefore, one of the symbols such as one of the award symbols, one of the null symbols, the trigger symbol or the wild symbol will be indicated

on a payline in the game.

Referring to Fig. 3A, in one embodiment the gaming device displays a plurality of reels and specifically three reels 34a, 34b and 34c. The reels include a plurality of symbols such as the letters A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H. The 5 reels also include at least one trigger symbol, such as a diamond symbol 102. It should be appreciated that one or more of the reels may include at least one trigger symbol. Additionally, each of the reels includes at least one wild symbol 105 and at least one null symbol or blank 104. A probability of being indicated is associated with each of the symbols on the reels. In the primary game, the 10 probability of each of the symbols being indicated on one of the reels is one in twenty (1/20) or 5.0% as shown in the probability table illustrated in Fig. 4A. If a triggering event occurs in the primary game, an award mode is initiated. In the award mode, the primary game is effectively reduced to a one-reel game. In addition, the null symbols 104 or blanks, and the trigger symbol, each re-spin or 15 re-activate the reels. Thus, the effective number of symbols on the reels is reduced from twenty symbols to nine symbols, which further increases the probability that one of the symbols will be indicated on the reels. Several paylines, such as paylines 56a, 56b and 56c are associated with the reels. It should be appreciated that one or more paylines may be associated with the 20 reels. A spins remaining display 106 indicates the number of spins remaining in the game. A total award display indicates the total value of the awards accumulated by the player in the game.

The gaming device provides the player with a number of spins in the game. The number of spins may be randomly determined, predetermined or 25 determined in any suitable manner. The player uses the spins to activate or spin the reels 34a, 34b and 34c. The gaming device provides an award associated with one or more winning symbol combinations indicated on one of the paylines 56a, 56b or 56c associated with the reels. The player continues to spin the reels until the player has no spins remaining as indicated by the spins 30 remaining display 106.

The trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 increases the probability that the player will obtain one of the awards in the game and specifically increases the probability that the player will obtain the largest award such as the jackpot

award in the game. The game preferably includes only one trigger symbol, designated as a diamond symbol 102, on one of the reels 34 in the game. In one embodiment, the middle reel 34b, includes the trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102. If the diamond symbol 102 is indicated on one of the paylines 56a, 5 56b or 56c, the gaming device initiates an award mode. In the award mode, the gaming device freezes or holds the reel 34b including the trigger symbol 102 stationary while the gaming device activates or spins the remaining reels or outside reels 34a and 34c, which are adjacent to the middle reel 34b. The gaming device activates or spins these reels until a wild symbol 105 is indicated 10 on the same payline as the trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102.

Once the wild symbols 105 are indicated on reels 34a and 34c and on the same payline as the trigger symbol 102, the gaming device holds or keeps these reels stationary. The symbols on payline 56b are wild symbol 105a on reel 34a, trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 on reel 34b and wild symbol 15 105b on reel 34c. The gaming device now re-spins or re-activates reel 34b until an award symbol such as one of the letters is indicated on payline 56b. Any award symbol 100 indicated on that payline will provide a symbol combination having three identical symbols matching the award symbol 100 indicated on that payline. This occurs because two of the symbols on that payline are the wild 20 symbols 105a and 105b as illustrated in Fig. 5C. Because only the middle reel 34b is re-activated or re-spun during the game to determine the award, the game is reduced to a one reel or single reel game. The player now only needs to obtain one award symbol to win an award in the award mode. More specifically, the player only has to spin one reel 34b to obtain the largest award 25 such as the jackpot award in the game. Thus, because the award mode reduced the game to a one reel or single reel game, the probability of obtaining any of the awards, and specifically the largest award in the game, increases significantly.

In the award mode, when the middle reel 34b is re-activated and the 30 trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 is indicated on payline 56b, the gaming device re-spins or re-activates reel 34b. Thus in one embodiment, the trigger symbol or diamond symbol does not provide an award to the player in the game. In another embodiment, an award is associated with the trigger symbol

and is provided to the player if the trigger symbol is indicated on the reel after the reel is re-activated in the award mode.

Similarly, if a non-award or null symbol (i.e., blank) 104 is indicated on payline 56b on reel 34b, the gaming device re-spins or re-activates reel 34b.

5 Thus, a null symbol does not provide an award to the player; rather, the reels are re-spun to give the player another opportunity to obtain one of the awards in the game. Once an award symbol 100 is indicated on the designated payline on reel 34b, the gaming device provides an award associated with the award combination including those symbols. If the award symbol happens to be the

10 jackpot symbol, the player obtains three of the jackpot symbols and therefore, the jackpot award in the game. The award received by the player in the game is transferred to the total award display 108 and provided to the player when the game ends. In one embodiment, the game ends when the player obtains an award in the game. In another embodiment, the game ends when the player

15 runs out of spins as indicated by the spins remaining display 106.

In a further embodiment, the gaming device includes a modifier such as a multiplier which changes such as by increasing when the null symbol occurs on the reel. The modifier such as the multiplier is employed in one embodiment to increase the award determined by the generated symbol on the reel.

20 By effectively reducing the game to a single reel or one reel game, the present invention significantly increases the probability of obtaining an award in the game without changing the random probability of occurrence. In particular, the present invention increases the probability or the likelihood that the player will obtain the largest award such as the jackpot award in the game. For

25 example, in a typical reel-type game, a player must obtain one of a plurality of designated symbol combinations on one or more of the paylines associated with a set of reels to obtain an award in the game. The gaming device or player spins the reels and the reels randomly indicate symbols on one or more of the paylines associated with the reels. If a winning symbol combination is indicated

30 on one of the designated winning paylines in the game, the gaming device provides an award associated with that winning symbol combination. The probability of obtaining a particular symbol combination, however, is based on the number of reels in a game and the number of symbols included on those

reels. Thus, the more reels and symbols in a game, the less likely or less probable it is that the player will obtain one of the winning symbol combinations in that game.

For example, a particular game of the gaming device may include three 5 reels, such as reels 34a, 34b and 34c in Fig. 3A. In this example, each of the reels includes twenty reel positions, which include nine award symbols as symbols A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H, one wild symbol, one trigger symbol and ten null symbols. In this example, the symbols must occur or be indicated on payline 56b to provide a winning symbol combination in the game. Thus, at the 10 beginning of the game each symbol has a 5% (1/20) chance or probability of being indicated on payline 56b on each of the reels as illustrated in Fig. 4A. As a result, the overall probability that a particular symbol combination will occur on that payline is $(1/20) \times (1/20) \times (1/20)$, which equals $(1/8000)$ or 0.013%. Therefore, in this example, because each symbol has a 5% (1/20) chance or 15 probability of being indicated on a single payline on the reels, the overall probability of a particular symbol combination occurring on that payline in the primary game (without the award mode) is $(1/8000)$ or 0.013%.

Referring to Fig. 3B, an example of a payout or award table is illustrated. In this example, a winning symbol combination in the primary game includes 20 three identical symbols. For instance, the jackpot award or largest award indicated on the table is the award of ten thousand associated with the symbol combination including three A symbols (i.e., A, A, A). The award associated with the other winning symbol combinations are also shown in the table. It should be appreciated that any suitable combination of symbols in a game may 25 be designated as a winning symbol combination.

Referring to Fig. 4A, a probability table for a primary game or base game indicates the probability of each of the symbols being indicated on a payline for each reel in the three reel slot game shown in Fig. 3A. The table also indicates the probability of being indicated on a payline associated with each of the 30 winning symbol combinations shown in Fig. 3B for each of the symbols on the reels and the probability of three null symbols or blanks being indicated on the payline. As illustrated in the table, the probability of each of the award symbols (i.e., A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H) being indicated on any one of the reels is $(1/20)$.

The probability of a winning symbol combination including one of the award symbols, the trigger symbol or the wild symbol, being indicated on the designated payline is (1/8000) (i.e., (1/20) x (1/20) x (1/20)). The probability of three null symbols or blanks being indicated on the payline is ((10/20) x (10/20) x (10/20)) or (1/8). Therefore, a player has a one in eight thousand chance in the primary game to obtain one of the winning symbol combinations, and specifically of obtaining the jackpot award in the game.

In the award mode of the present invention, the number of reels is effectively reduced to one reel or one active reel such as reel 34b. As a result, 10 the probability of obtaining a particular symbol or a particular symbol combination increases significantly. Referring to Fig. 4B, a probability table illustrates the probabilities of each of the symbols being indicated on the reel in the award mode. Additionally, the table illustrates the probability of a winning symbol combination, which in the award mode is one award symbol, being 15 indicated on the payline in the award mode. Because the trigger symbol and the null symbols cause the reel to re-spin in the award mode, the number of effective award symbols in the award mode is reduced to nine. Therefore, the probability of each of the award symbols or the wild symbol being indicated on the payline in the game (through the award mode) is (1/180), which is the 20 probability of the trigger symbol being indicated on the payline in the primary game (1/20) multiplied by the probability of any one of the award symbols or the wild symbol being indicated on the payline in the award mode, which is (1/9). The probability of one of the award symbols or the wild symbol being indicated in the game (through the award mode) is therefore, (1/20) x (1/9) or (1/180) as 25 shown in Fig. 4B. Accordingly, the overall probability of obtaining a specific symbol combination is (0.013% (1/8000) +0.56% (1/180) which equal 0.573%.

Referring to Fig. 3A, in one example of the award mode of the present invention, if a trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 is indicated on payline 56b in a primary game, an award mode is initiated and the outside reels 34a and 30 34c are re-activated or re-spun until wild symbols are indicated on payline 56b. Then, the reels 34a and 34c are held stationary while the middle reel 34b is re-activated or re-spun until an award symbol is indicated on payline 56b. The probability or likelihood of obtaining a particular symbol combination on the reels

has now increased because the player only has to obtain one award symbol on reel 34b in order to obtain an award in the game.

In this example, the middle reel 34b includes twenty reel positions including eight award symbols, one wild symbol, a trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102, and ten null symbols 104 as shown in Figs. 1C and 3A. Therefore, 5 the player initially has a one in twenty chance of obtaining the trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 on reel 34b in the primary game as described above. In the award mode, if the player obtains the trigger symbol 102 or one of the null symbols 104 on payline 56b after the reel 34b is re-activated, the gaming device 10 re-spins or re-activates reel 34b again until an award symbol 100 is indicated on payline 56b. Because the trigger symbol 102 and the null symbols 104 re-spin or re-activate the reels in the award mode, the actual number of symbols that provide an award and end the bonus mode are nine (i.e., the eight award symbols and the wild symbol). Therefore, the player has a one in nine chance 15 of obtaining an award symbol 100 in the award mode and thereby a 11.1% chance of obtaining a winning symbol combination on payline 56b. As a result, the overall probability of obtaining a winning symbol combination on the reels in the award mode is determined by taking the probability of obtaining the trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 on reel 34b in the initial or primary game, which 20 is 1 in 20 (1/20), multiplied by the probability or the likelihood of one of the award symbols being indicated on payline 56b, which is 1 in 9 (1/9). The overall probability therefore equals (1/180) or 0.56% for obtaining any one of the winning symbol combinations on the reels in the game (through the award mode) as shown in Fig. 4B. Thus, the probability of obtaining a winning symbol 25 combination on the reels in the primary game is 1 in 8000 or 0.013% and this probability increases to 1 in 180 or 0.56% in the award mode. This significantly increases a player's opportunities or chances of obtaining one of the awards in the game and specifically a relatively large award such as the jackpot award. This increases a player's excitement and enjoyment of the game.

30 Referring to Figs. 5A through 5F, an example of one embodiment of the present invention is illustrated where the player obtains a trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 in the primary game or primary mode. This example includes three reels 34a, 34b and 34c as shown in Fig. 5A, where each reel

includes a plurality of award symbols A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H, one trigger symbol designated as diamond symbol 102, one wild symbol 105 and ten null symbols 104. The player begins the game with five spins as indicated by the spins remaining display 106 as shown in Fig. 5A. Additionally, the player begins

5 the game with an award of zero as indicated by the total award display 108. The player uses their first spin as shown in Fig. 5B to activate or spin the reels. A trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 is indicated on payline 56b on reel 34b. The trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 initiates the bonus mode of the present invention.

10 Referring to Fig. 5C, the gaming device freezes or holds reel 34b stationary while spinning or re-spinning the outside reels 34a and 34c until wild symbols 105a and 105b, respectively, are indicated on payline 56b on those reels. As indicated by the spins remaining display 106, the number of spins does not decrease when these reels are activated or re-activated to indicate the

15 wild symbols. Additionally, the total award display 108 indicates that the player does not obtain an award for obtaining the trigger symbol (i.e., diamond symbol 102) or the wild symbols 105a or 105b. In another embodiment, the gaming device provides an award associated with the trigger symbol and/or the wild symbols.

20 Referring to Fig. 5D, the outside reels 34a and 34c are stationary or cannot be re-activated, therefore the gaming device or player can only re-activate or re-spin reel 34b. In Fig. 5D the gaming device re-activates reel 34b and a null symbol 104 is indicated on payline 56b. The symbol combination of a wild symbol 105a, a null symbol 104 and wild symbol 105b on reels 34a, 34b

25 and 34c, respectively, is not a winning symbol combination in the game. Therefore, the player does not receive an award for this symbol combination. However, the null symbol 104 does not end the game, but instead causes the gaming device to automatically re-spin or re-activate reel 34b. Thus, the null symbol 104 provides the player with another opportunity to obtain an award

30 symbol in the game. The number of spins remaining in the award mode does not decrease as indicated by the spins remaining display 106 and the total award still remains at zero as indicated by the total award display 108.

Alternatively, as indicated above, the game upon the occurrence of the null symbol can change such as increment a modifier (such as a multiplier) which is employed to modify and preferably increase the award to the player.

Referring to Fig. 5E, the gaming device or player re-activates reel 34b in 5 the game. The trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 is indicated on payline 56b on reel 34b. The resultant symbol combination is the wild symbol 105a, the trigger symbol 102 and the wild symbol 105b, on reels 34a, 34b and 34c, respectively, which is not a winning symbol combination. Similar to the null symbol 104 shown in Fig. 5D, the trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 causes 10 the gaming device to re-activate or re-spin reel 34b. Therefore, the player has another opportunity to obtain an award symbol in the game. The number of spins remaining in the bonus mode and the total award did not change in the game as indicated by the spins remaining display 106 and the total award display 108.

15 Referring to Fig. 5F, the gaming device or player re-spins and re-activates reel 34b in the award mode. After this spin, an award symbol designated by the letter A (110) is indicated on payline 56b on reel 34b. As a result, a winning symbol combination including wild symbol 105a on reel 34a, award symbol 110 on reel 34b and wild symbol 105b on reel 34c is indicated on 20 payline 56b. This symbol combination provides a combination of three A symbols 110 because the wild symbols act or equal the award symbol 110. In this example, a combination including three A symbols provides the jackpot or largest award of ten thousand to the player as indicated by the total award display 108. Thus, the trigger symbol or diamond symbol 102 increases the 25 probability or likelihood that the player will obtain an award and particularly the jackpot award in the game. The player has four spins remaining as indicated by the spins remaining display 106. In one embodiment, the player uses the remaining spins to spin the reels four more times in the award mode. In another embodiment, the game ends when the player obtains an award in the game.

30 Referring to Fig. 6, another embodiment of the present invention is illustrated where the symbols on the middle or central reel 34b include awards, such as the values of twenty, one hundred and five. In the award mode of this embodiment, the player re-spins or re-activates reel 34b until one of the award

values are indicated on payline 56b. Instead of obtaining a winning symbol combination in the game, the player obtains three times the value of the indicated award or value on payline 56b. For example, in Fig. 6, the award of one hundred is indicated on payline 56b in the award mode. Therefore, the 5 combination of the award of one hundred with the wild symbols 205a and 205b provide an award of three hundred because the wild symbols match the award value indicated on payline 56b on reel 34b. Thus, the player obtains an award of three hundred as indicated by the total award display 108 in the award mode. It should be appreciated that any symbols, values or any combination of 10 symbols or values may be employed on the reels in the award mode of the game of the present invention.

Referring to Fig. 7, a further embodiment of the present invention is illustrated where the middle or center reel 34b includes a wild symbol 105b. In this embodiment, the player re-spins reel 34b after obtaining the trigger symbol 15 or diamond symbol 102 as described above. If the player obtains the wild symbol on payline 56b on reel 34b, the player obtains a symbol combination including three wild symbols 105a, 105b and 105c. Thus, the player obtains the largest award or the highest or most desirable symbol combination associated with the game such as the jackpot symbol combination because the player 20 obtained three wild symbols on payline 56b. Thus, the wild symbol 105b increases the probability that the player will obtain the largest award such as the jackpot award in the game. In another embodiment, an award or award value is associated with the symbol combination including the wild symbol as shown in Fig. 3B.

25 In one alternative embodiment of the present invention, the number of spins of the reel can be limited such as to a predetermined number, a randomly determined number, or a number based on another functional game element such as the player's wager.

While the present invention is described in connection with what is 30 presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiments, it should be appreciated that the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiments, and is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the claims. Modifications

and variations in the present invention may be made without departing from the novel aspects of the invention as defined in the claims, and this application is limited only by the scope of the claims.

It should be understood that various changes and modifications to the 5 presently preferred embodiments described herein will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Such changes and modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention and without diminishing its intended advantages. It is therefore intended that such changes and modifications be covered by the appended claims.

CLAIMS

The invention is claimed as follows:

1. A gaming device comprising:
 - a plurality of reels;
 - 5 a plurality of symbols on said reels, said symbols including at least one trigger symbol;
 - at least one payline associated with the reels;
 - 10 a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of said symbols; and
 - 15 a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when the trigger symbol occurs on the payline, repeatedly re-activate the reel including the trigger symbol in the award mode until one of the other symbols on said reel occurs on the payline and provide a player the award, if any, associated with one of the combinations of said symbol.
- 20 2. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the reels include at least one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols occurs on the payline on said reel in the award mode.
3. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein the reels include a plurality of trigger symbols.
- 25 4. The gaming device of Claim 1, wherein an award is associated with at least one combination of each of said symbols.
5. A gaming device comprising:
 - a plurality of reels;
 - 25 a plurality of symbols on said reels, said symbols including at least one trigger symbol;
 - at least one payline associated with the reels;
 - 30 a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of said symbols; and
- 30 a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when the trigger symbol occurs on the payline, re-activate the reel including the trigger symbol in the award mode at least once, and if one of the symbols on said reel occurs on the payline, provide a player the award, if any, associated

with one of the combinations of said symbol.

6. The gaming device of Claim 5, wherein said reel is reactivated a plurality of times or until one of the symbols on said reel of the trigger symbol occurs on the payline.

5 7. The gaming device of Claim 5, wherein an award is associated with at least one combination of each of said symbols.

8. A gaming device comprising:
a plurality of reels;
a plurality of symbols on said reels, said symbols including at least one
10 trigger symbol;
at least one payline associated with the reels;
a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of said
symbols; and
a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when
15 the trigger symbol occurs on the payline, repeatedly re-activate one of the reels
in the award mode until one of the symbols on said reel occurs on the payline
and provide a player the award, if any, associated with one of the combinations
of said symbol.

9. The gaming device of Claim 8, wherein the reels include at least
20 one null symbol and wherein said re-activated reel is re-activated when one of
the null symbols occurs on the payline on said reel in the award mode.

10. The gaming device of Claim 8, wherein an award is associated
with at least one combination of each of said symbols.

11. A gaming device comprising:
25 a plurality of reels;
a plurality of symbols on said reels, said symbols including at least one
trigger symbol;
at least one payline associated with the reels;
a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of said
30 symbols; and
a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when
the trigger symbol occurs on the payline, re-activate one of the reels in the
award mode at least once, and if one of the symbols on said reel occurs on the

payline, provide a player the award, if any, associated with one of the combinations of said symbol.

12. The gaming device of Claim 11, wherein said re-activated reel is reactivated a plurality of times or until one of the symbols on said reel occurs on 5 the payline.

13. The gaming device of Claim 11, wherein an award is associated with at least one combination of each of said symbols.

14. A gaming device comprising:
a plurality of reels;
10 a plurality of symbols on said reels, said symbols including at least one trigger symbol or trigger symbol combination; and

15 a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of said symbols, wherein one of said awards is provided to a player in an award mode which begins when the trigger symbol or trigger symbol combination occurs on the reels, wherein the award is determined based on the symbol which occurs on one of the reels in at least one re-activation of one said reels, wherein said award is associated with one of the combinations of said symbol.

15. A gaming device comprising:
a plurality of reels including a plurality of award symbols, a trigger symbol 20 and at least one wild symbol;
a payline associated with the reels;
a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of the award symbols; and

25 a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline, indicate the wild symbol on the payline on all of the reels except the reel including the trigger symbol in the award mode, re-activate the reel including the trigger symbol until an award symbol is indicated on the payline in the award mode, and provide a player the award, if any, associated with one of the combinations of said indicated award 30 symbol.

16. The gaming device of Claim 15, wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline in the award mode.

17. The gaming device of Claim 16, wherein the reels include at least one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols is indicated on said reel in the award mode.

18. The gaming device of Claim 15, wherein the reels include at least 5 one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols is indicated on said reel in the award mode.

19. The gaming device of Claim 15, which includes a multiplier which is incremented each time the null symbol occurs on the payline on the reactivated reel and wherein the award provided to the player is modified by the 10 multiplier.

20. The gaming device of Claim 15, which includes a probability of being indicated on the payline associated with each of the award symbols, the trigger symbol and the wild symbols on the reels.

21. The gaming device of Claim 20, wherein the probability associated 15 with the trigger symbol is less than the probabilities associated with at least one of the award symbols and wild symbols.

22. The gaming device of Claim 20, wherein the probability associated with the trigger symbol is less than a plurality of the probabilities associated with the award symbols and wild symbols.

20 23. The gaming device of Claim 20, wherein the probability associated with the trigger symbol is less than all of the probabilities associated with the award symbols and wild symbols.

24. The gaming device of Claim 15, which includes at least one relatively large award and a plurality of relatively small awards associated with 25 the combination of award symbols on the reels.

25. The gaming device of Claim 24, which includes a separate probability of being indicated on the payline in the award mode associated with each of the combinations of award symbols.

26. The gaming device of Claim 25, wherein the probability associated 30 with the combination of award symbols associated with the relatively large award is less than a plurality of the probabilities associated with the combination of award symbols associated with the relatively small awards.

27. The gaming device of Claim 25, wherein the probability associated with the combination of award symbols associated with the relatively large award is less than all of the probabilities associated with the combination of award symbols associated with the relatively small awards.

5 28. The gaming device of Claim 15, wherein the reels include a plurality of trigger symbols.

29. The gaming device of Claim 15, which includes re-activations of the reel including the trigger symbol until an award symbol is indicated on the payline in the award mode or for a predetermined number of activations.

10 30. The gaming device of Claim 15, wherein an award is associated with at least one combination of each of said symbols.

31. A gaming device comprising:
a plurality of reels including a plurality of award symbols, a trigger symbol and at least one wild symbol;

15 a payline associated with the reels;
a plurality of awards associated with different combinations of the award symbols; and
a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline, indicate the wild symbol on the
20 payline on all of the reels except the reel including the trigger symbol in the award mode, re-activate the reel including the trigger symbol at least once in the award mode and provide a player the award, if any, associated with one of the combinations of any indicated award symbol on the payline.

32. The gaming device of Claim 31, wherein the reel including the
25 trigger symbol is re-activated when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline in the award mode.

33. The gaming device of Claim 32, wherein the reels include at least one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols is indicated on said reel in the award mode.

30 34. The gaming device of Claim 31, wherein the reels include at least one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols is indicated on said reel in the award mode.

35. The gaming device of Claim 34, which includes a multiplier which is incremented each time the null symbol occurs on the payline on the reactivated reel and wherein the award provided to the player is modified by the multiplier.

5 36. The gaming device of Claim 31, which includes a separate probability of being indicated on the payline in the award mode associated with each of the award symbols.

37. The gaming device of Claim 31, wherein the reels include a plurality of trigger symbols.

10 38. The gaming device of Claim 31, which includes re-activations of the reel including the trigger symbol until an award symbol is indicated on the payline in the award mode or for a predetermined number of activations.

39. The gaming device of Claim 31, wherein an award is associated with at least one combination of each of said symbols.

15 40. A gaming device comprising:

a plurality of reels including a plurality of award symbols, a trigger symbol and at least one wild symbol;

a plurality of paylines associated with the reels; and

20 a processor operable to activate the reels, initiate an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on one of the paylines associated with the reels, indicate the wild symbol on the payline associated with all of the reels except the reel including the trigger symbol in the award mode, re-activate the reel including the trigger symbol until an award symbol is indicated on said payline in the award mode and provide an award associated with the indicated award symbol to a player.

25 41. The gaming device of Claim 40, wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when the trigger symbol is indicated on said payline in the award mode.

42. The gaming device of Claim 41, wherein the reels including at 30 least one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols is indicated on said reel in the award mode.

43. The gaming device of Claim 40, wherein the reels including at

least one null symbol and wherein the reel including the trigger symbol is re-activated when one of the null symbols is indicated on said reel in the award mode.

44. The gaming device of Claim 40, which includes a separate 5 probability of being indicated on one of the paylines in the award mode associated with each of the award symbols.

45. The gaming device of Claim 40, wherein the reels include a plurality of trigger symbols.

46. The gaming device of Claim 40, wherein the award associated 10 with the indicated award symbol is an award associated with a combination of a number of the indicated award symbols.

47. The gaming device of Claim 46, wherein the number equals the number of reels.

48. A gaming device comprising:
15 a game;
a plurality of reels displayed in the game, each of the reels including a plurality of symbols;
a plurality of symbol combinations;
a plurality of awards associated with said symbol combinations;
20 a payline associated with the reels;
a probability of being indicated on the payline associated with each of the symbol combinations;
an award mode associated with the game; and
a processor operable to increase the probability associated with the 25 symbol combinations in the award mode by effectively decreasing the number of reels in the award mode.

49. A gaming device comprising:
a game;
a plurality of reels displayed in the game, each of the reels including a 30 plurality of symbols;
a plurality of symbol combinations;
a plurality of awards associated with the symbol combinations;
a payline associated with the reels;

a probability of being indicated on the payline associated with each of the symbol combinations;

an award mode associated with the game; and

5 a processor operable to increase the probabilities associated with the symbol combinations in the award mode by effectively decreasing the number of symbols on the reels in the award mode.

50. A method for operating a gaming device comprising the steps of:

(a) randomly generating a plurality of symbols on a plurality of reels, wherein the symbols include a plurality of award symbols, a trigger symbol and 10 at least one wild symbol; and

(b) initiating an award mode when the trigger symbol appears on a payline associated with the reels, wherein said award mode includes:

(i) indicating the wild symbol on the payline on each of the reels except the reel including the trigger symbol;

15 (ii) re-activating the reel including the trigger symbol until one of the award symbols is indicated on said payline; and

(iii) providing an award associated with the indicated award symbol to a player.

51. The method of Claim 50, wherein the step of indicating the wild symbol includes the step of indicating each wild symbol on the payline on which 20 the trigger symbol occurred.

52. The method of Claim 50, wherein the step of providing the award to the player includes providing an award associated with the award symbol indicated on said payline on the reel.

25 53. The method of Claim 50, wherein the steps (a) to (b) are provided to the player through a data network.

54. The method of Claim 53, wherein the data network is an internet.

55. A method for operating a gaming device comprising the steps of:

(a) randomly generating a plurality of symbols on a plurality of reels, 30 wherein the symbols include a plurality of award symbols, a trigger symbol and at least one wild symbol; and

(b) initiating an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on one of a plurality of paylines associated with the reel, wherein the award mode

includes:

- (i) indicating the wild symbol on said payline on all of the reels except the reel including the trigger symbol;
- (ii) re-activating the reel including the trigger symbol until one of the award symbols is indicated on said payline; and
- (iii) providing an award associated with the indicated award symbol to a player.

56. The method of Claim 55, wherein the steps (a) to (b) are provided to the player through a data network.

10 57. The method of Claim 56, wherein the data network is an internet.

58. A method for operating a gaming device comprising the steps of:

- (a) randomly generating a plurality of symbols on a plurality of reels based on a probability of being indicated on a payline associated with each of the symbols on the reels, wherein the symbols include a plurality of award symbols, a trigger symbol and at least one wild symbol; and
- (b) initiating an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline, wherein the award mode includes:

15 (i) increasing the probabilities associated with each of the symbols in the award mode by decreasing the number of active reels in the award mode;

20 (ii) indicating one of the award symbols in the award mode based on the probabilities; and

(iii) providing an award associated with the indicated award symbol to a player.

25 59. The method of Claim 58, which includes the step of increasing the probabilities associated with the symbols by re-spinning the reels when one or more designated symbols are indicated on the payline.

60. The method of Claim 58, which includes the step of increasing the probabilities associated with the symbols by re-spinning the reels when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline.

30 61. The method of Claim 58, wherein the steps (a) to (b) are provided to the player through a data network.

62. The method of Claim 61, wherein the data network is an internet.

63. A method for operating a gaming device comprising the steps of:

(a) randomly generating a set of symbols from a plurality of symbols on a plurality of reels, wherein the symbols include a plurality of award symbols, null symbols, and at least one trigger symbol; and

5 (b) initiating an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline, wherein the award mode includes:

(i) increasing the probabilities associated with each of the symbols in the award mode by decreasing the number of symbols in the award mode;

(ii) indicating once of the award symbols in the award mode based on 10 the probabilities; and

(iii) providing an award associated with any indicated award symbol to a player.

64. The method of Claim 63, wherein the steps (a) to (b) are provided to the player through a data network.

15 65. The method of Claim 64, wherein the data network is an internet.

66. A method for operating a gaming device comprising the steps of:

(a) randomly generating a set of symbols from a plurality of symbols on a plurality of reels, wherein the symbols include a plurality of sward symbols, a plurality of null symbols, and at least one trigger symbol; and

20 (b) initiating an award mode when the trigger symbol is indicated on the payline, wherein the award mode includes:

(i) re-activating one of the reels at least once;

(ii) re-activating said reel if any one of the null symbols on said re-activated reel is indicated on the payline;

25 (iii) re-activating said re-activated reel if any of the trigger symbols on said re-activated reel is indicated on the payline; and

(iv) providing an award associated with any indicated award symbol on the payline after said re-activations.

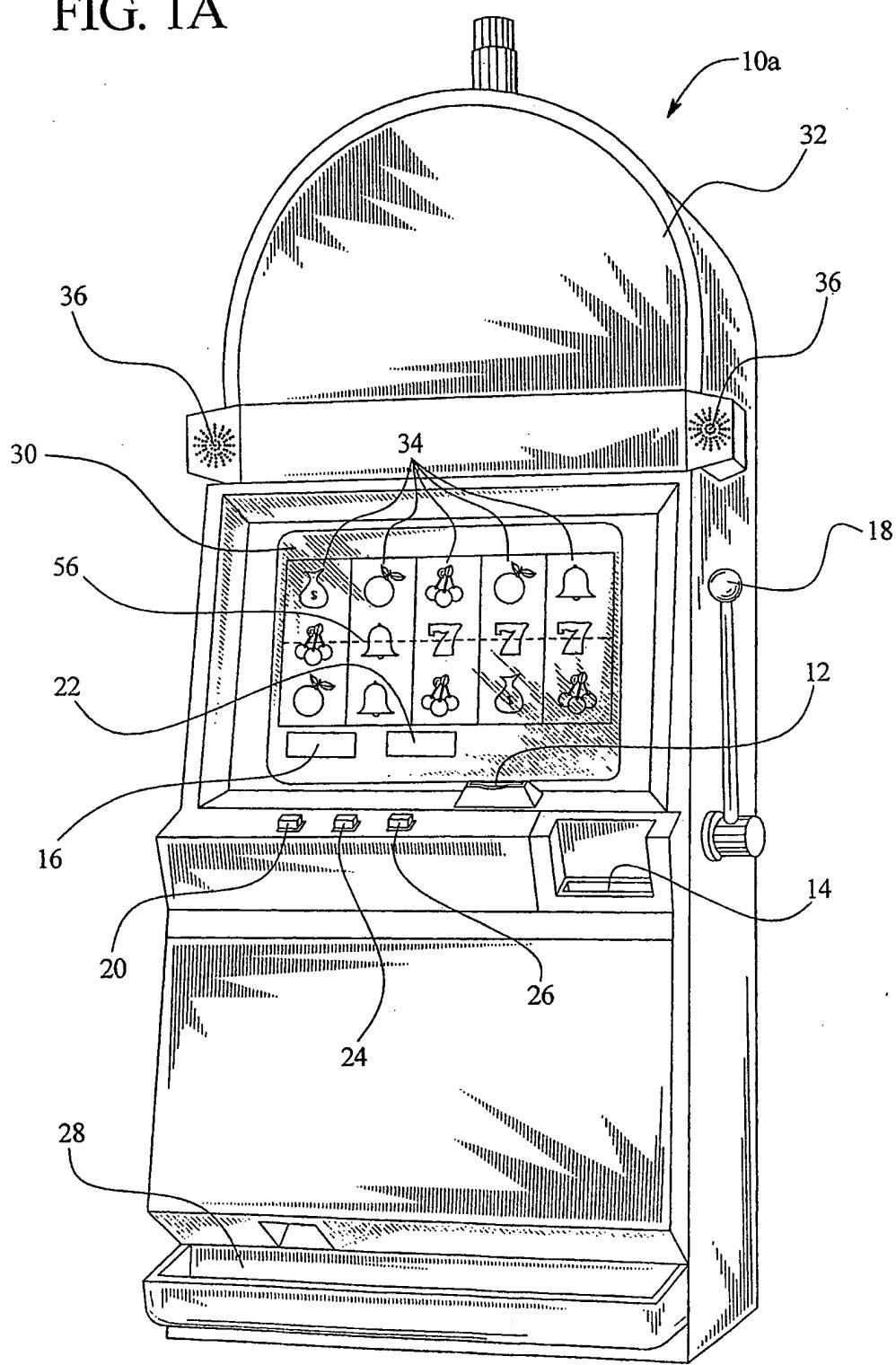
67. The method of Claim 66, which includes re-activating the 30 reactivated reel until an award is indicated on the payline.

68. The method of Claim 66, wherein the steps (a) to (b) are provided to the player through a data network.

69. The method of Claim 68, wherein the data network is an internet.

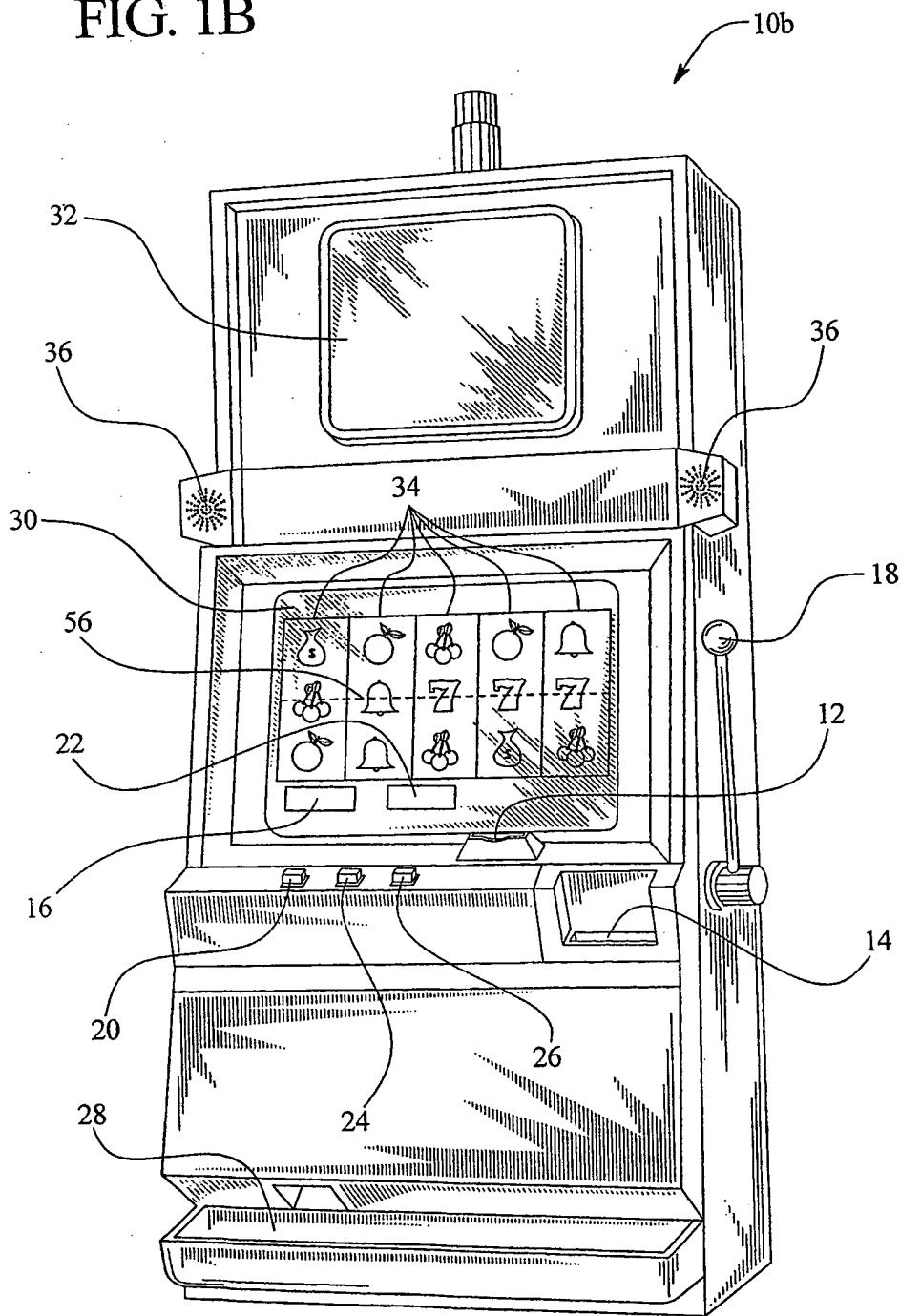
1/10

FIG. 1A



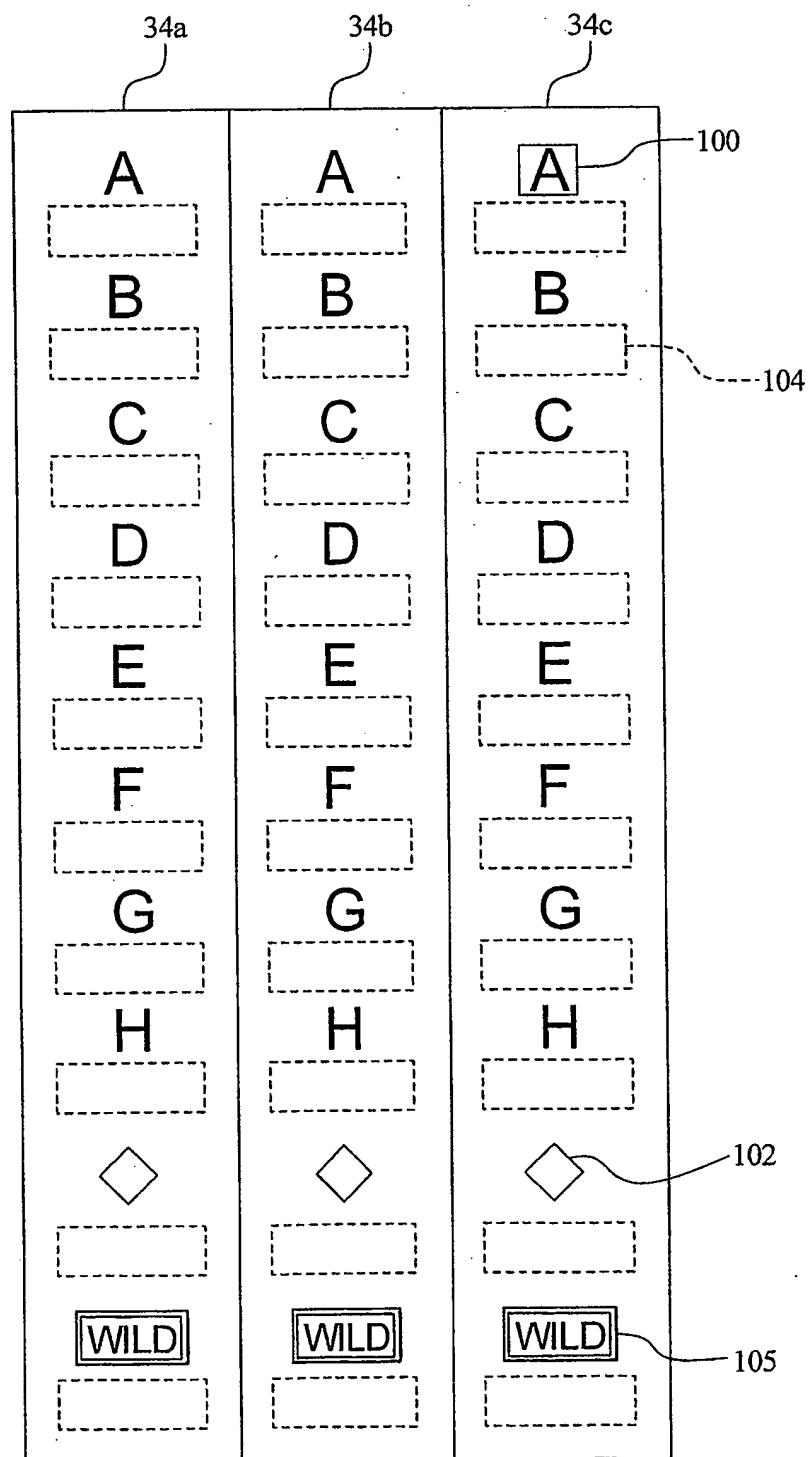
2/10

FIG. 1B



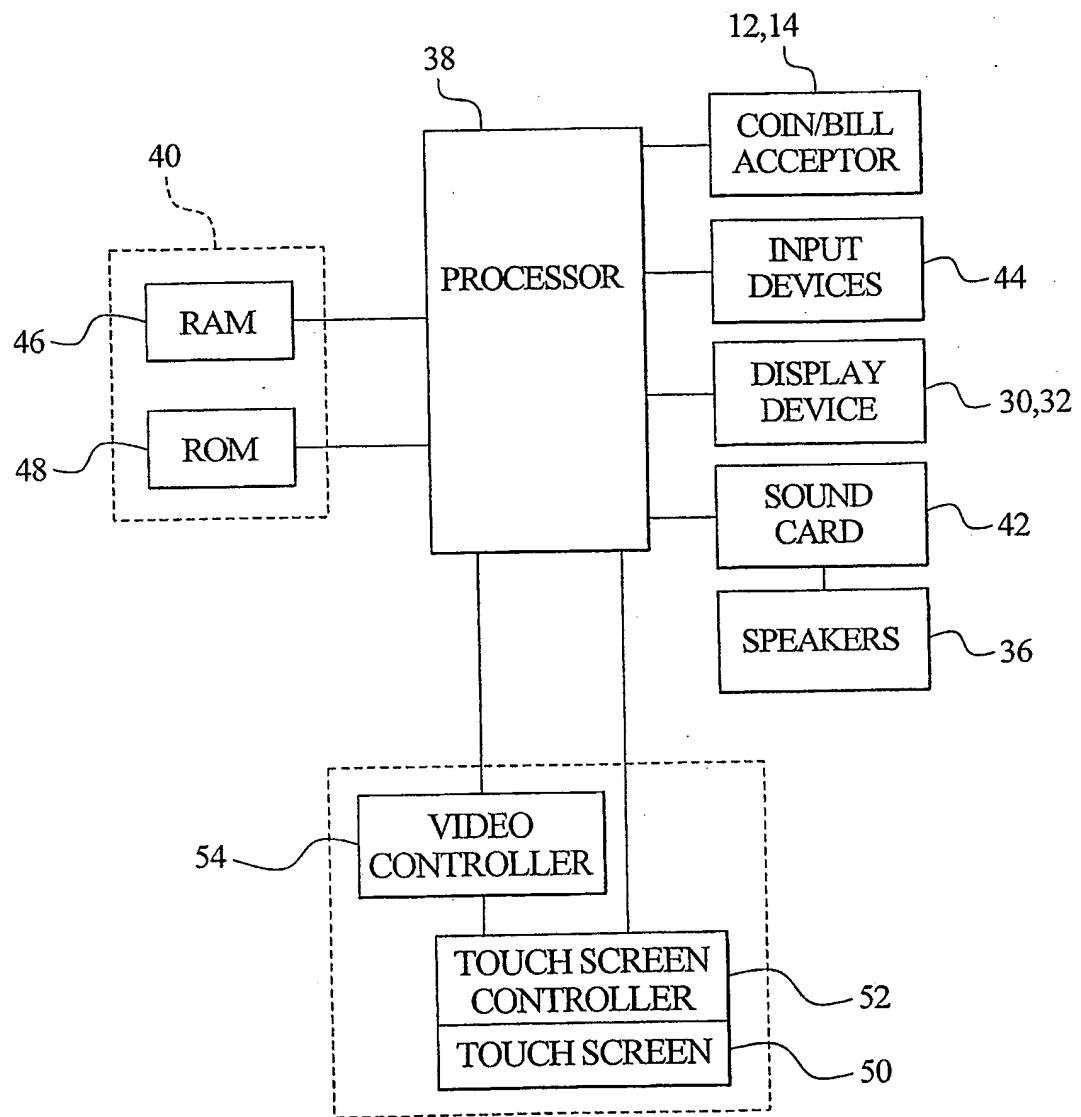
3/10

FIG. 1C



4/10

FIG. 2



5/10

FIG. 3A

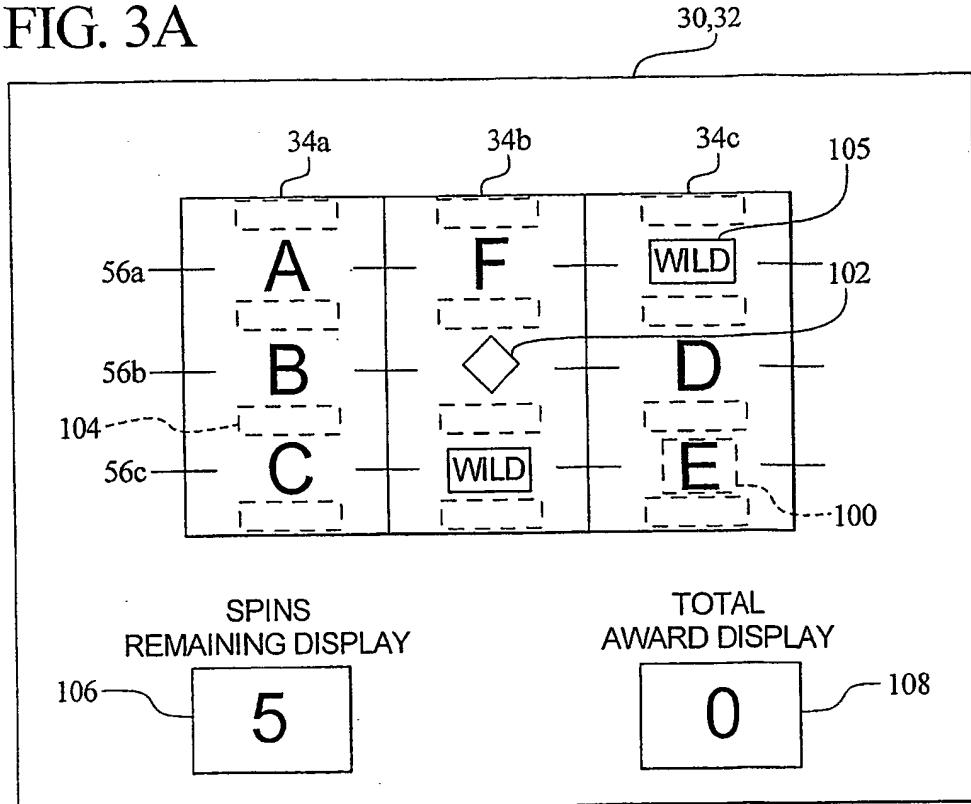


FIG. 3B

SYMBOL COMBINATION	AWARD
AAA	10,000
BBB	1000
CCC	500
DDD	100
EEE	75
FFF	50
GGG	25
HHH	10
WILD WILD WILD	10
◊ ◊ ◊	5

6/10

FIG. 4A

SYMBOL COMBINATION	PROBABILITY OF A SYMBOL ON REEL 1	PROBABILITY OF A SYMBOL ON REEL 2	PROBABILITY OF A SYMBOL ON REEL 3	PROBABILITY
	REEL 1	REEL 2	REEL 3	TOTAL
AAA	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
BBB	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
CCC	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
DDD	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
EEE	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
FFF	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
GGG	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
HHH	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
[WILD] [WILD] [WILD]	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
◇ ◇ ◇	1/20	1/20	1/20	1/8000
	10/20	10/20	10/20	1/8

FIG. 4B

SYMBOL	PROBABILITY OF THE TRIGGER SYMBOL	PROBABILITY OF A SYMBOL ON	PROBABILITY OF A SYMBOL ON	PROBABILITY OF A SYMBOL ON	PROBABILITY
		REEL 1	REEL 2	REEL 3	TOTAL
A	1/20		1/9		1/180
B	1/20		1/9		1/180
C	1/20		1/9		1/180
D	1/20		1/9		1/180
E	1/20		1/9		1/180
F	1/20		1/9		1/180
G	1/20		1/9		1/180
H	1/20		1/9		1/180
[WILD]	1/20		1/9		1/180

7/10

FIG. 5A

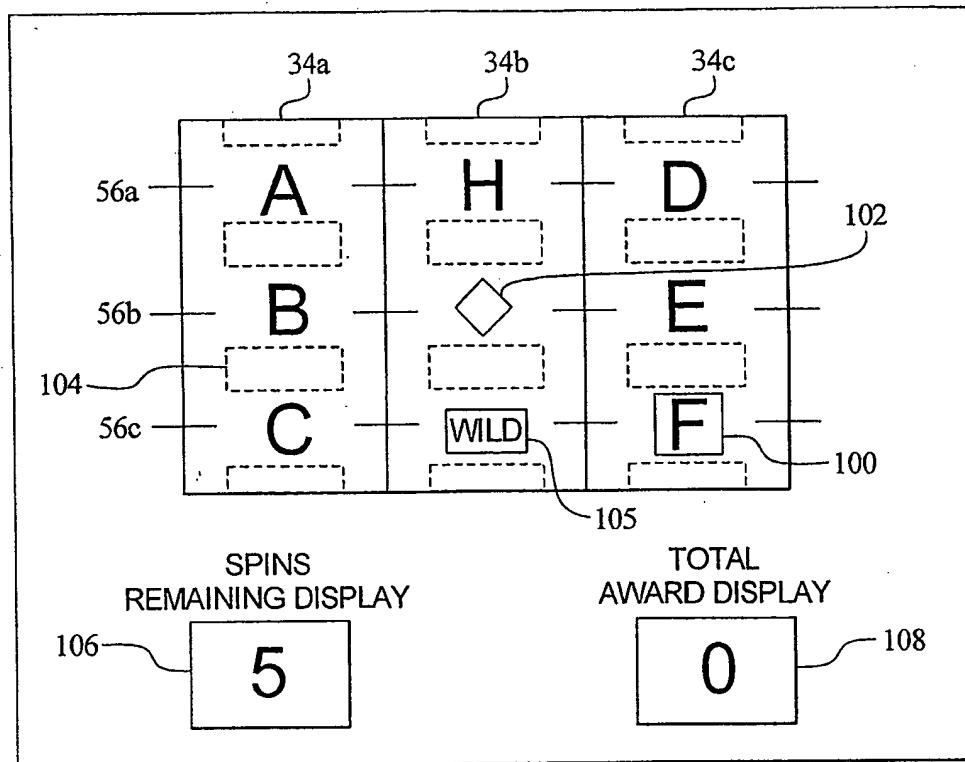
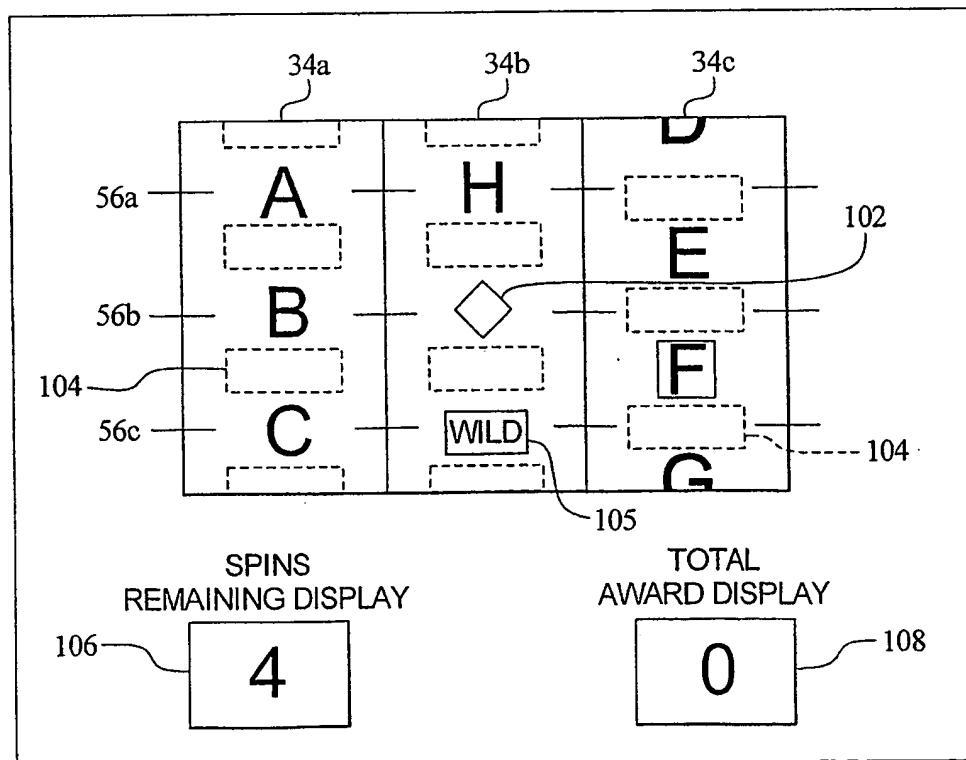


FIG. 5B



8/10

FIG. 5C

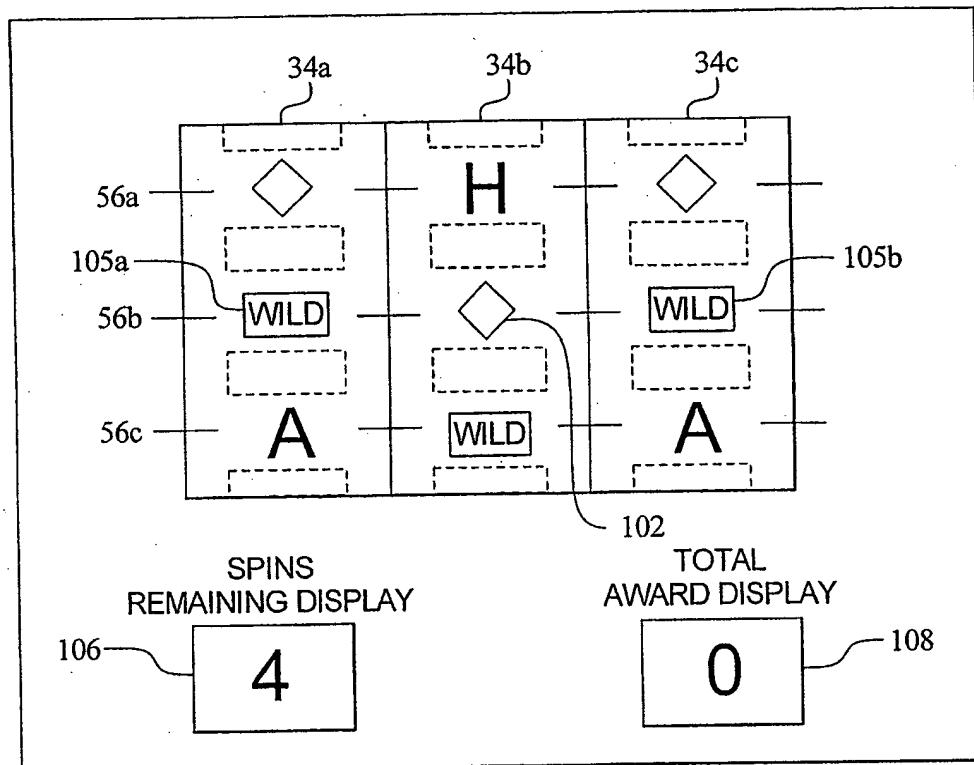
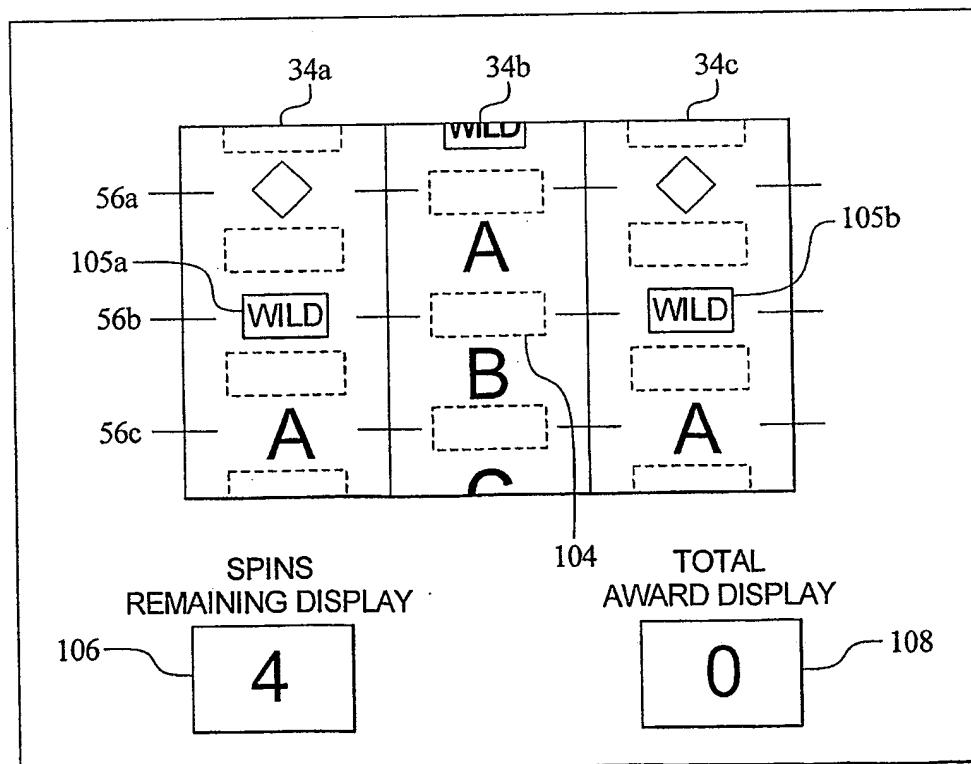


FIG. 5D



9/10

FIG. 5E

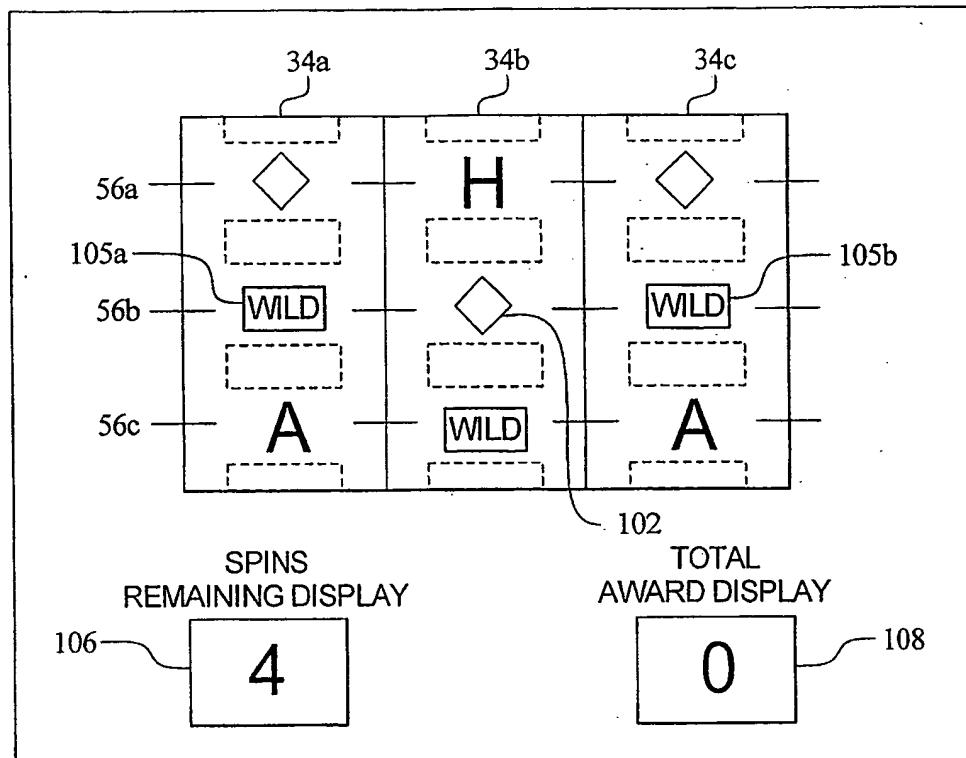
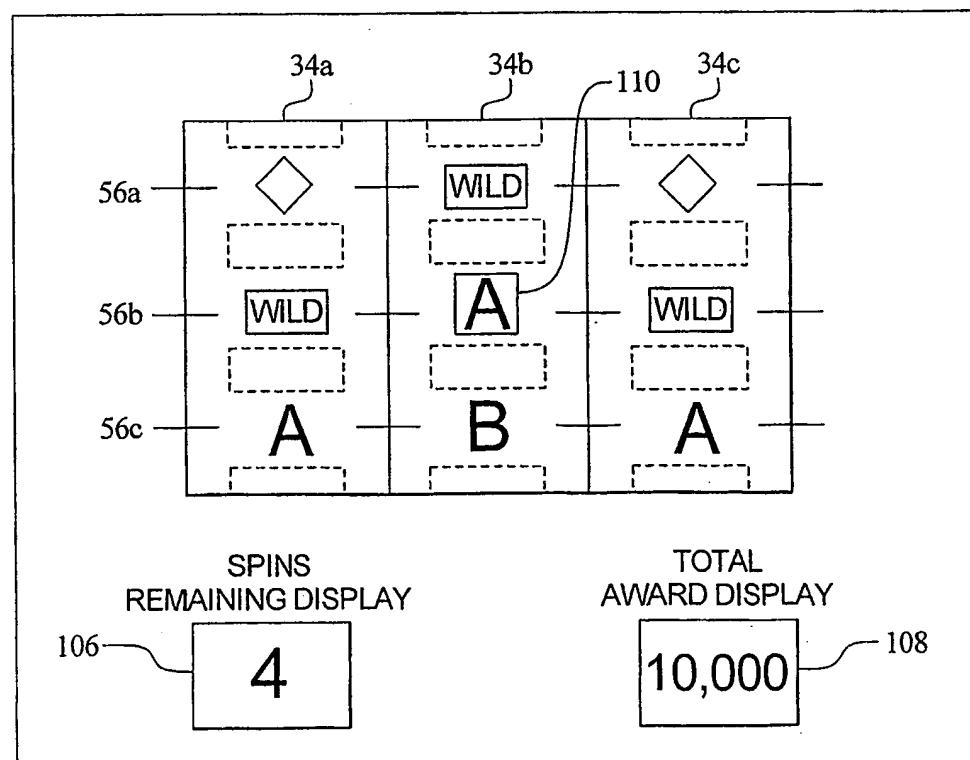


FIG. 5F



10/10

FIG. 6

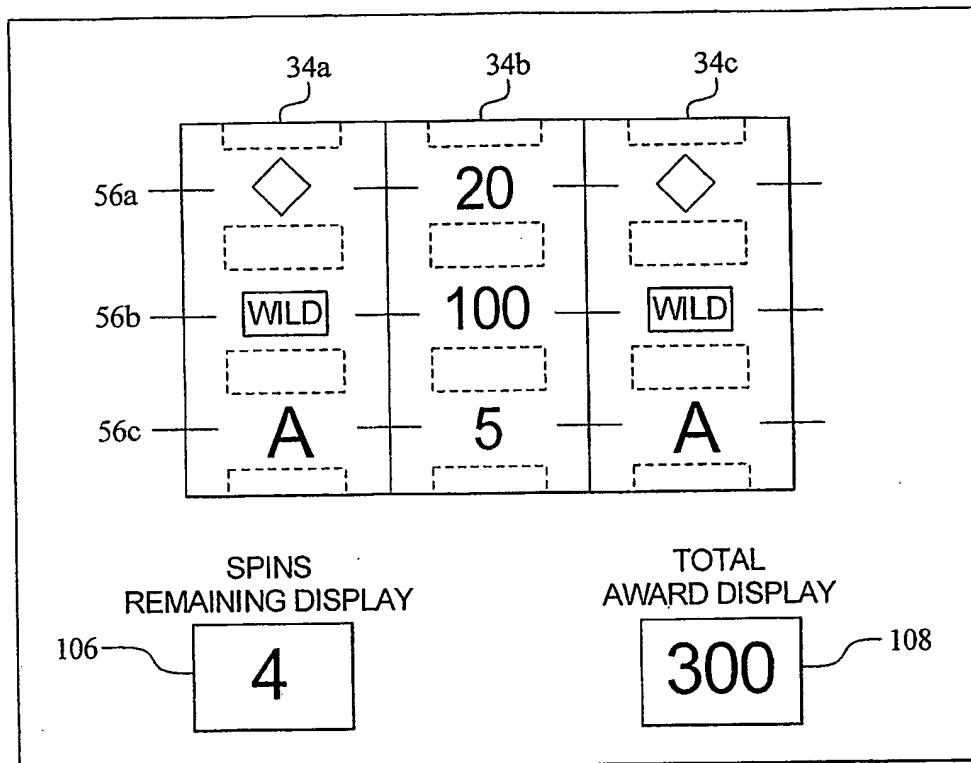
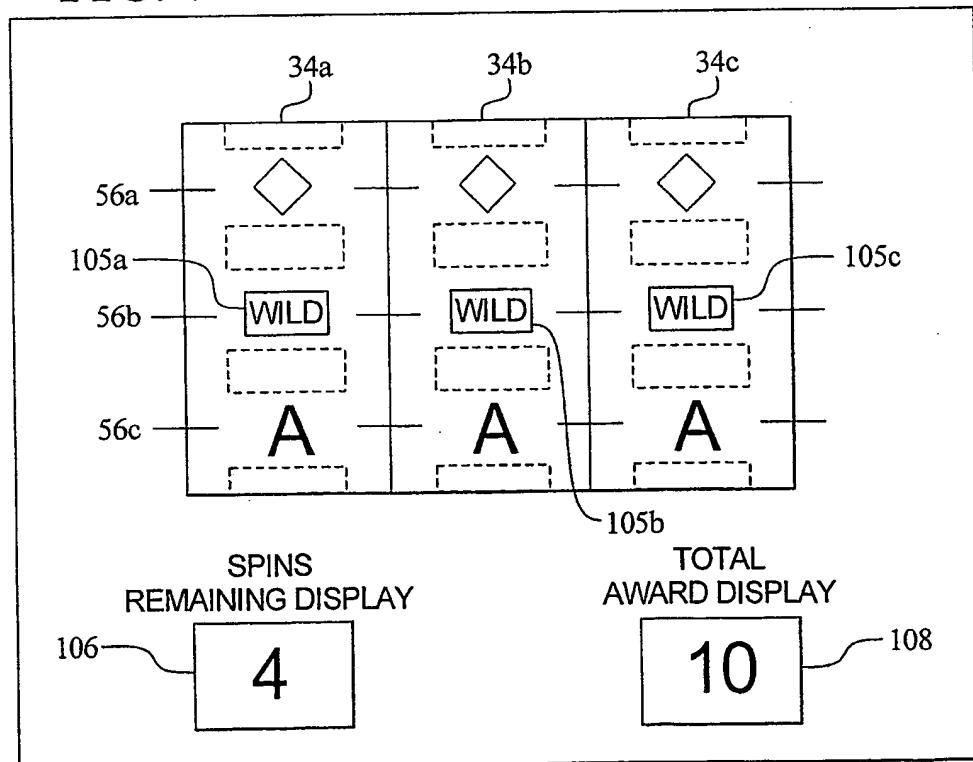


FIG. 7



**This Page is Inserted by IFW Indexing and Scanning
Operations and is not part of the Official Record**

BEST AVAILABLE IMAGES

Defective images within this document are accurate representations of the original documents submitted by the applicant.

Defects in the images include but are not limited to the items checked:

BLACK BORDERS

IMAGE CUT OFF AT TOP, BOTTOM OR SIDES

FADED TEXT OR DRAWING

BLURRED OR ILLEGIBLE TEXT OR DRAWING

SKEWED/SLANTED IMAGES

COLOR OR BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS

GRAY SCALE DOCUMENTS

LINES OR MARKS ON ORIGINAL DOCUMENT

REFERENCE(S) OR EXHIBIT(S) SUBMITTED ARE POOR QUALITY

OTHER: _____

IMAGES ARE BEST AVAILABLE COPY.

As rescanning these documents will not correct the image problems checked, please do not report these problems to the IFW Image Problem Mailbox.